

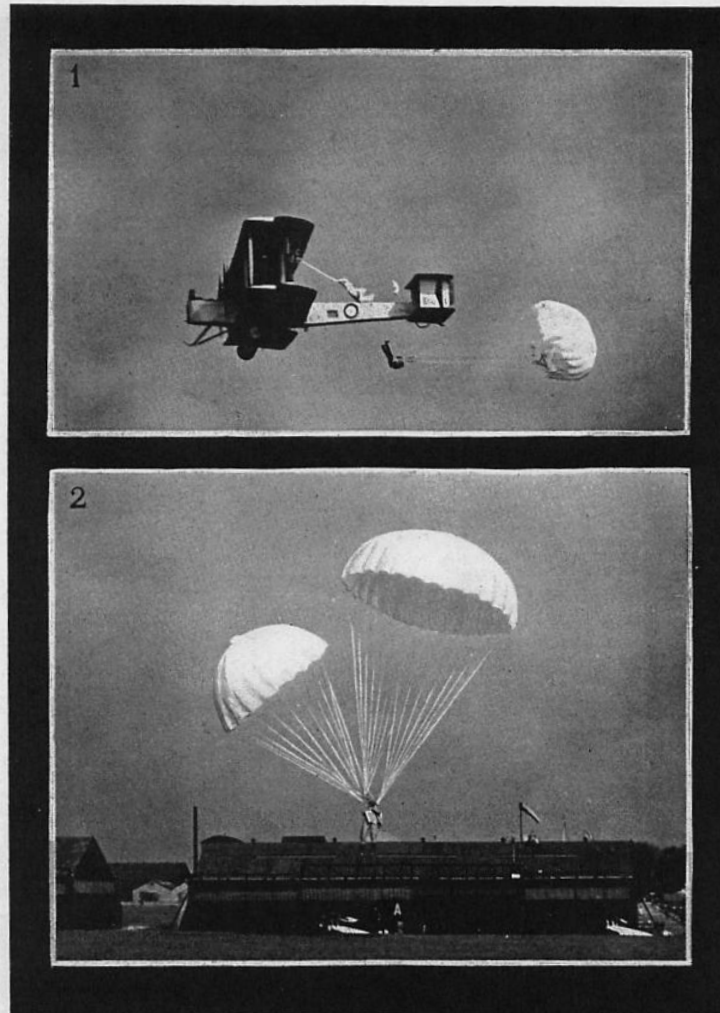
RAF COLLEGE CRANWELL

College Journal Extracts



Autumn 1926

Autumn 1926 - Lead Photos



PARACHUTE DESCENTS AT CRANWELL.

- (1) Two Pull offs.
- (2) Main and Reserve Parachutes opened.

Autumn 1926 - Prize Cadets



[Photo, Gale & Polden, Ltd., Aldershot.]

THE PRIZE WINNERS—SUMMER, 1926.

F./C. H. A. Purvis (The R.M. Groves Memorial Prize).
F./C. Sergt. W. L. Freebody (The Abdy Gerrard Fellowes
Memorial Prize and the English and History Prize).
F./C. Cpl. K. S. Brake (Aeronautical Engineering).
F./C. Under-Officer B. C. Yarde (The Sword of Honour).



HUMPHREY FRANCIS PICKFORD.

Autumn 1926 - Lead Article (1)

THE AIR FORCE IN IRAQ.

BY AIR MARSHAL SIR JOHN SALMOND, K.C.B., C.M.G., C.V.O., D.S.O.

(Reprinted by the courtesy of the R.U.S.I. Journal).

(Continued from page 12, Vol. VI, No. 1).

PART II.

THIS situation called for urgent and drastic action. Meanwhile there were not sufficient troops to carry out operations on the Mosul front and in Kurdistan at the same time. It was now the beginning of March, and from information I received as to the attitude of Angora towards war, I judged it possible to transfer the bulk of the forces from Mosul for an operation against Kurdistan and to leave me time to bring them back should the situation again deteriorate.

I would like to make it clear and to emphasise that it was only made possible through the facilities offered by rapid air travel, to reach the decisions come to on this and other occasions, after conference with local civil administration, police and interviews with officers on the spot.

Without a proper gauge of the multifarious conditions and contingencies obtained in this way, over a very wide field, in my opinion it would have been both impossible, unwise and hazardous in the extreme to have embarked on the various operations we did with small forces at great distance, with little or no communications as the term is usually understood. Consequently, orders were issued on 18th March for the troops at Mosul to be formed into two columns:—

An Imperial Column, called Koicol., under command of Col. Comdt. Vincent, consisting of:—3 Inf. Bns., 1 Pack Battery, 1 Coy. Sappers and Miners, Ancillary Services, directed on Koisanjak; and

A Levy Column, called Frontiercol., under command of Col. Comdt. Dobbin, consisting of:—3 Inf. Bns., 1 Section Pack Batty., 1 Machine Gun Coy., directed on Rowunduz.

Air Forces for these columns were based on Mosul, Erbil and Kirkuk. Iraq Army troops, although anxious to take part in the expected fighting, guarded adequately our communications.

The rôle of Koicol. on reaching Koisanjak was:—

- (1) To overawe the turbulent tribes of the Rania plain, which had gained greatly in confidence and prestige consequent on the reverse inflicted on the Rania Column in September, 1922.
- (2) To withdraw pressure from Frontiercol. during its advance on Rowunduz.
- (3) To isolate Sheikh Mahmoud from the Turks.

My further intention was that, if all went well with Frontiercol., Koicol. could continue its advance from Koisanjak on Sulimania, Sheikh Mahmoud's stronghold. On the other hand, from Koisanjak it was in a position from which it could arrive on the flank of any force seriously threatening Frontiercol.

It will take too long to go into the details of these operations.

Frontiercol. came up against a very strong position, prepared by Euzdemir with all the usual Turkish skill. I considered it could not be taken without heavy loss to the attacking troops and accordingly decided that Koicol. should be diverted from Koisanjak to outflank it.

Accordingly, Koicol., which had already fought a successful action at Rania and recovered all the missing parts of two guns lost the previous year, turned N.W., fought another successful action at a most difficult position against a force of Turks and tribesmen, and outflanked the position held by Euzdemir across the path of Frontiercol. The Turks fled over the Persian border, where they were disarmed and interned, and Rowunduz was entered on 22nd April.

This was the first day of the meeting of the Lausanne Conference and we could henceforward substantiate our claim to the *status quo* in Kurdistan on which to such a very great degree would later depend the very existence of Iraq.

Frontiercol. remained at Rowunduz while Koicol. countermarched and was directed on Sulimania. Sulimania was occupied after a very rapid march on the 17th May. The organisation which Sheikh Mahmoud had painfully built was broken up by columns operating from that centre. Sheikh Mahmoud fled to the border and our Kurdistan operations had been brought to a successful conclusion.

The result of these operations was far-reaching. The Turkish correspondence which had been intercepted made it clear that their occupation of Rowunduz and their steady progress of infiltration was a stage in their plan to bring the whole of Kurdistan down to Khanakin under Turkish control.

By the beginning of June, all Turkish troops had been driven across the border into Persia. The tribal leaders, without exception, made haste to disavow their allegiance to the Turk and to comply with our requirements, and throughout the area a condition of respect for law and order and the decrees of Government supervened which these wild districts have never before known.

The following paragraph is an extract from a telegram forwarded by His Excellency the High Commissioner to the Secretary of State for the Colonies with regard to the effect of the forward move to Mosul and subsequent operations:—

"It is difficult to exaggerate the improvement of the political situation effected during the past three months, first, by the move of troops to Mosul, and later by the successful operations in Kurdistan. The impression that the return of the Turks was imminent has now vanished and this has had great effect in Baghdad, Mosul and among the Euphrates tribes."

From this date it was possible gradually to effect those reductions in the total garrison which were to be effected under the R.A.F. Scheme of Control, until, in December of the same year, the Infantry garrison stood at 4 Bns. as envisaged by the Cairo Conference.

Before passing from these combined operations, I would like to describe to you some of the functions carried out by the R.A.F. beyond those normal ones of reconnaissance, photography, engagement of ground targets and bombing ahead of our columns.

By means of messages dropped and picked up, column commanders were enabled to communicate with each other, a vital matter in a turning movement of any description, and with my advanced H.Q. at Erbil, and this on the move when wireless was out of action. Air messages from columns to co-operating aircraft ensured that information of a special nature was received in quickest time.

At a most important juncture in the operations, when the junction of both converging columns was almost, but not quite, complete and it was necessary to very closely co-ordinate plans for a combined advance on Rowunduz, an appreciation and orders passed between the two columns by air message, and I received a copy at the same time.

At his march stages along the steep valley, O.C. Koicol. had established ration dumps under strong guard. It was essential for him to know in what regularity his supplies were passing. Aircraft provided this means and on one occasion dropped messages on each post in turn and in 24 hours delivered replies to the column commander.

The rapidity with which this column was able to move was assisted by their employment on one or two occasions for picqueting heights; this saved the troops much exhaustion and consequently lessened the time and distance.

By a system of communication between picqueting posts and aircraft they were able to deal with snipers which were annoying the column and delaying its movement.

The wear and tear on boots and socks was prodigious, due to the steep climbing on rocky and rain-soaked ground. To meet this, 1,000 pairs of boots and 3,000 pairs of socks, together with a similar quantity of urgent stores, were supplied by air.

On one day, 4 tons of barley—that is, a day's rations—were dropped, but the breakable nature of the containers scattered the grain and it was not of much value. I am satisfied, however, that when this method of supplying has been more fully investigated and a cheap form of parachute has been properly tried out, this method of emergency supply will prove a valuable asset to a Commander in warfare of this type.

Some 200 dysentery and diarrhoea cases were evacuated at Baghdad, a distance of 200 miles. These must otherwise have had a six days' journey on donkeys and at the least have suffered severely.

Finally, from Advanced H.Q. at Erbil I was in intimate touch with both column commanders, with Mosul, the lines of communication, and the High Commissioner in Baghdad. By a flight of between 500 and 600 miles in one day, I could ascertain by the best of all methods—personal interview—the situation on all fronts and what was passing through the minds of people on the spot, and I was never out of touch with the state of the Interior of Iraq through the High Commissioner.

Autumn 1926 - Lead Article (2)

In the meantime, what had been happening in the Interior, and how had the R.A.F. in purely Air operations, unaccompanied by mobile columns, been able to cope with their task? All sporadic attempts had been easily quelled—for instance, one of the most serious was that in which the British Div. Advisor in Diwanjah had been shot at and wounded while on tour. Orders to the Sheikh whose men had attempted the murder to come in to Government were ignored and Air action became necessary. After Air action had taken place, the Police, acting in co-operation with Aircraft, were able to enter his villages and deal satisfactorily with the incident.

I could quote other instances different in degree but similarly dealt with during the whole period of my command. Their total amounts to 288 occasions on which purely Air operations were undertaken apart from the combined operation in Kurdistan. The burthen of the story is the same. Air Power and that alone made it possible in this country of vast distances and primitive communications to hold all the strings at one moment, to tighten one here and loosen one there, and to act swiftly and surely at the right spot at the right moment.

Now, as the Turkish menace to our borders receded, so did the situation in Iraq proper improve. From July onwards to the end of my command last April there was only one outbreak of disorder in areas already under the administration of Government. Otherwise, those occasions on which active measures had to be taken were in areas where previously Government control had been only nominal. The very marked improvement in the situation generally throughout the country now made it possible for the Iraq Government to consolidate its position and bring certain unadministered areas under the regular system of administrative control.

This task at time engendered open defiance to Government officials or police or other emblems of authority, and so it happened in the area which lies between Rumaitha and Samawa on the Euphrates.

It is occupied by tribesmen who are well armed, good fighters, and with a long record of successful resistance to Government. In Turkish times it was always a plague spot and had remained so ever since, defying all comers and constituting a hot-bed of intrigue and trouble for the future.

The area is most inaccessible and so intersected with irrigation channels that it can be crossed only by pack animals. Any attempt to deal with it is complicated by the proximity of the Basrah—Baghdad Railway. During the rebellion of 1920 this line was torn up and I was particularly anxious that, if we undertook operations there again, this should not occur for reasons of prestige and public confidence.

It was generally agreed that it would not be possible to bring this area under control without recourse to active measures, and I was asked by the High Commissioner to consider the form it should take. I considered that this was about to be a more ticklish job than any the R.A.F. had hitherto undertaken.

Until, however, an ultimatum should be delivered, there was time to consider the problem in detail. The situation was thoroughly discussed with local British advisers and police, and by means of our Intelligence system we had knowledge of the location and character of the dwellings of each recalcitrant Sheikh.

It was our object to demonstrate that only those who refused to obey Government orders should be punished, and of these those only who were responsible for the disloyalty of their followers. A special target map was accordingly prepared to ensure action being confined to these objectives.

The Sheikhs of the area, numbering 42, were then summoned to the local Headquarters of Government at Samawah. One only appeared with a satisfactory guarantee.

Accordingly, the following day, trains containing armoured car detachments, aircraft stores and ground organization for three advanced aerodromes selected were despatched. Iraq Levies and Iraq army detachments guarded the two railway bridges and Samawah town.

Air action commenced the next morning, and by the afternoon of the following day the majority of Sheikhs had surrendered. This was followed by the entry of Police and British and Iraqi Government officials into the area to establish Civil Administration. Thus this operation took two and a half days and was carried out at a distance of 150 miles from Baghdad.

Had it been necessary to use military forces, the nature of the country would have made it a lengthy and difficult operation: lines of communication in a hostile country would have had to be maintained and nothing less than a division, in my opinion, would have sufficed to bring about a similar result—and that only after inflicting immense hardship on the enemy and suffering many casualties among our own troops.

On no occasion was action taken in the Air which sooner or later would not have necessitated the despatch of a column.

I will not describe any more of these purely air operations, but I will draw your attention to what I consider an overpowering advantage of the type of warfare and an almost incredible fact.

The whole of the results were obtained at the expense of one casualty—dead—to our side. Add to these, 1 killed, 14 wounded in the combined Kurdistan operation, there emerges this consideration. (I am unable to tell you the exact number of the enemy casualties, but they were infinitesimal.)

Could we have wrested Kurdistan from the Turk—an operation considered too dangerous to undertake on the old system without a very large increase in force—or imposed such a measure of control on the tribes of the interior that it became possible to reduce the garrison to 4 Bns. if the Air Arm had not been used as the primary Arm to bring about these results?

Would the suffering amongst the enemy or ourselves have been any less if slow moving columns had penetrated the country, suffering great hardships from heat and thirst if not from disease, laying waste in their track farms, homesteads and the life of the country, with the inevitable aftermath of famine to the inhabitants? I think you will agree that the answer must be in the negative.

Is Air Warfare humane? No. Because that is a paradox. But it is quicker, more efficient and is accompanied by infinitely less suffering than the use of a military expeditionary force.

Air action by the knowledge of its swiftness and certainty acts as a powerful deterrent to the tribesman. Although he may be many hundreds of miles away he knows that defiance of Government will surely be followed by retribution.

On the other hand, he knows very well that action by forces on the ground is slow to be taken. Expense, political necessity, lengthy and elaborate organisation are involved before an expedition into hostile country can be undertaken and tend to make its initiation a slow process, and of this he takes full advantage.

Thus, it is more usual to allow minor outbreaks to go unchecked until their cumulative effect makes the despatch of a column a necessity. And when at length the column is despatched, the process of restoring order involves the burning of entire villages, wholesale destruction and confiscation of livestock and almost inevitably also the loss of numerous lives, both of the tribesmen and our own troops.

How many hundreds of thousands of young British lives have been so sacrificed abroad and how many hearts have been broken at home by the old glorious methods of waging war?

And on the other side—What measure of order and tranquillity resulted to the country? This may be gauged by the fact that from the heterogeneous collection of wild and inarticulate tribes has emerged an ordered system of representative government by vote, with a Legislative Assembly elected by the people themselves.